the QANTAS SOCCEROOS v KUWAIT WED 16 AUG 2006 AUSSIE STADIUM

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GAME ON
Kuwait's football history

GERMANY 2006
Harry's golden moment

PLUS...

MARK MILLIGAN
Sydney FC's young gun is ready to fire

LUCAS NEILL
The man, the moment, the future

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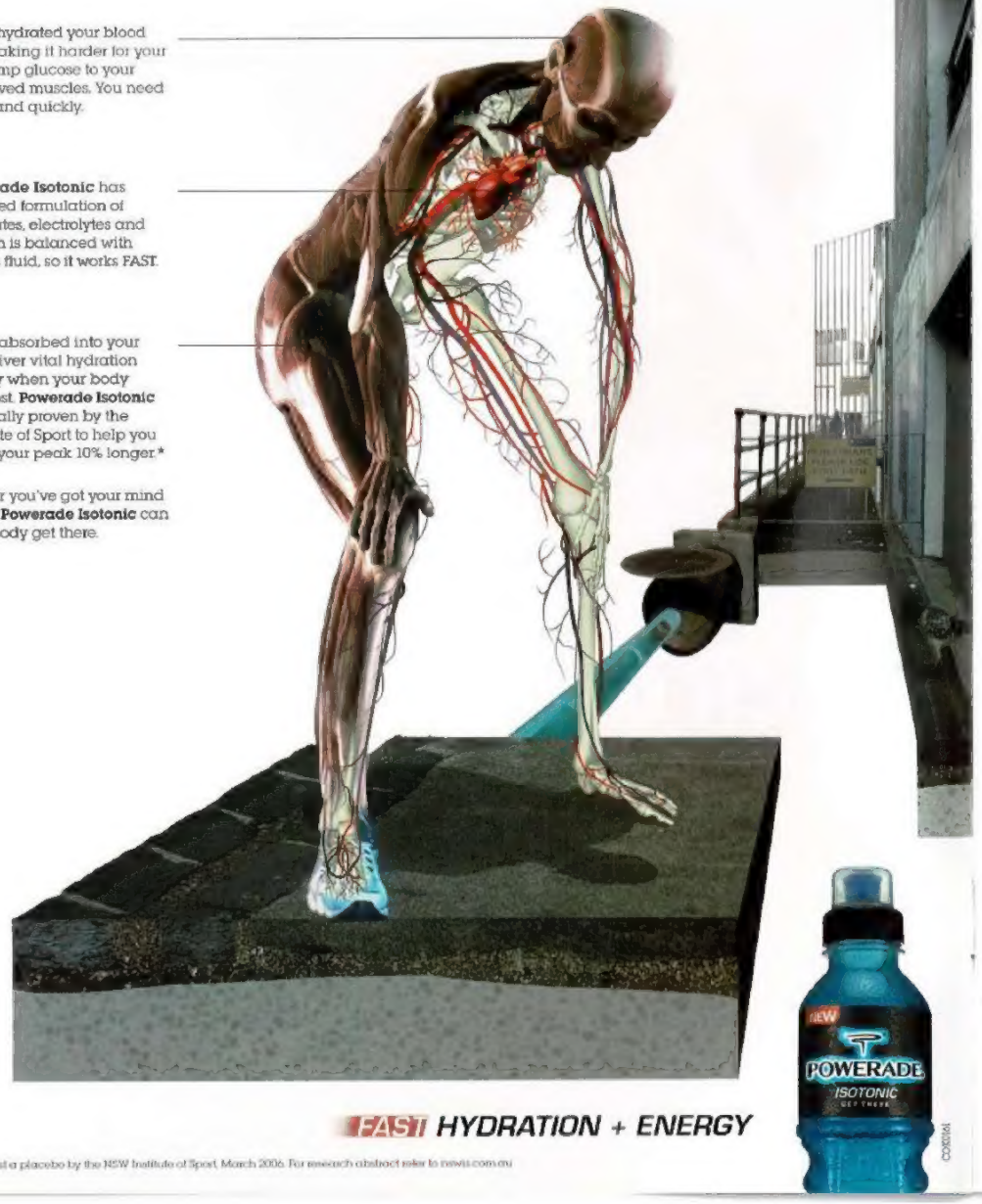

FAST HYDRATION + ENERGY

*When tested against a placebo by the NSW Institute of Sport, March 2006. For research abstract refer to newis.com.au

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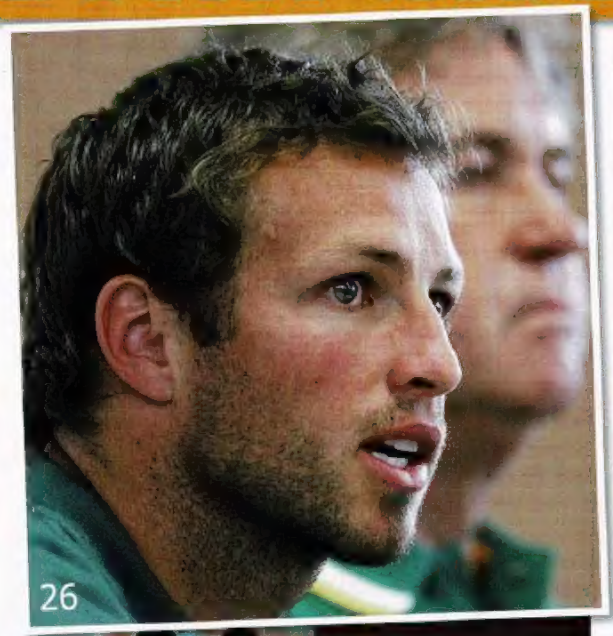

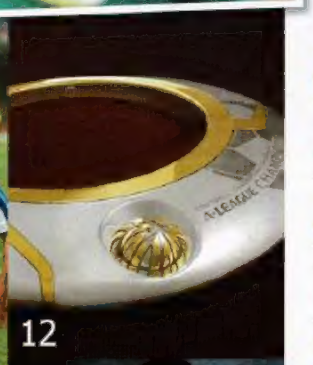

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Lucas Neill

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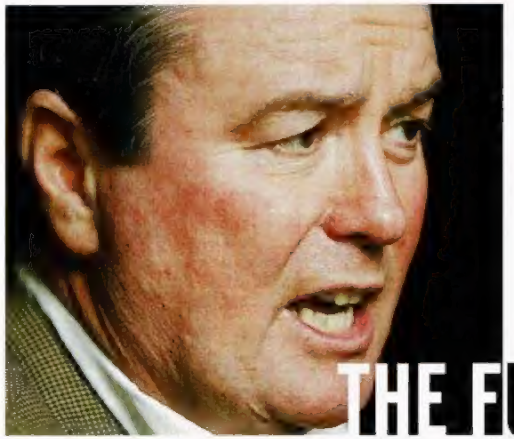
AUSTRALIA

Telstra
OFFICIAL PARTNER

JOHN O'NEILL



THE FUTURE IS NOW

"Tonight's match has huge significance on the qualifying group after the unfortunate withdrawal of the Lebanon team."

On behalf of Chairman Mr Frank Lowy and the Board of Football Federation Australia welcome to the 2007 AFC Asian Cup qualification match between the Qantas Socceroos and Kuwait.

Tonight's match has huge significance on the qualifying group after the unfortunate withdrawal of the Lebanon team.

Our move into the Asian Football Confederation this year has resulted in some significant opportunities for our teams to play more meaningful competitive matches.

After a wonderful FIFA World Cup campaign where the Qantas Socceroos did us all proud, it's now our focus to first of all qualify for the 2007 AFC Asian Cup and then be as successful as possible in the finals.

Tonight we welcome on board John Kosmina as Assistant Coach. The FFA is delighted to be able to offer a position like this to a local product who has contributed so much to the game as a player and as a national league coach.

For many players tonight will be an opportunity to show John and Head Coach Graham Arnold that they are capable of taking the step up to the national team and push for inclusion in further squads. We wish them all well.

With the second season of the Hyundai A-League just around the corner I urge you all to get out and support your local club as it promises to be just as memorable as the first year.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the NSW Government and to all of our partners: Qantas, Nike, Hyundai, Powerade, Telstra, NAB, Westfield, Australian Sports Commission and SBS.

Best Wishes

John O'Neill

John O'Neill AO
CEO
Football Federation Australia

SHEIKH AL-SABAH

PERPETUAL FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL AMBITION

"... football lovers all over the world raised their glasses to those players who showed extraordinary ability and talent."

Football fans in our two friendly countries are all looking forward to the Asian Cup 2007 qualifying match between Kuwait and Australia. The Kuwait Football Association considers this match a special event as this visit will reflect the existing strong relationship between our two countries.

Our national team appreciates and will salute the Australian champions for their performance in the World Cup. They were marvellous; football lovers all over the world raised their glasses to those players who showed extraordinary ability and talent. They entertained us all, particularly the member countries of the Asian Football Confederation.

Of course, we will be strong competitors against the Qantas Socceroos in tonight's match. It is the right of all teams to compete with respect, while appreciating their opponent.

Finally I hope that the two sides will compete in the spirit of fair play. The competition though, will never affect the bonds between us regardless of the outcome of the match.

Sheikh Ahmad Yousef S.Al-Sabah
President
Kuwait FA

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MORRIS IEMMA

WELCOME TO NEW SOUTH WALES

"On behalf of the Government and people of New South Wales, I welcome the members of the Kuwaiti team and wish them well."

The outstanding performance of the Qantas Socceroos in the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals in Germany crowned the most successful year ever for Australian football.

It was the year Australian football came of age, not just with our World Cup performance but with the success of the Hyundai A-League and our triumphant entry into the Asian Football Confederation.

Tonight's Australia-Kuwait Asian Cup qualifier reflects the transforming nature of Australia's membership of the Asian Football Confederation.

Membership of the Confederation puts Australia into one of the world's most exciting football regions, a competitive arena in which to build a stronger football culture and start the long journey to the 2007 Asian Cup and the 2010 World Cup.

On behalf of the Government and people of New South Wales, I welcome the members of the Kuwaiti team and wish them well.

I know they and their Socceroo counterparts will provide a spectacle of football outstanding not only for its quality but also for its spirit of sportsmanship and friendship.

Morris Iemma MP
Premier and Minister for State Development

01 KEWELL VOLLEYS HOME TO SEND AUSTRALIA THROUGH

WHEN AUSTRALIA was fatefully drawn against Japan, Brazil and Croatia in Group F, questions started immediately. Would we cope against an onslaught from the Samba Boys? Would the Asian champions be too quick? Should we fear the powerful Croatians? Even the most optimistic Socceroo supporters pondered whether our team really would make it to the knockout stage.

History has now been written, and the Socceroos proved valiant competitors. Our boys showed class, played with flair, dominated more favoured sides and sent our country into a frenzy. Our boys united a nation.

Even more questions were raised leading into the World Cup when Harry Kewell, John Aloisi and Tim Cahill reported to camp with niggling injuries. Kewell's groin injury proved the worst, forcing him to undergo intense rehabilitation in Europe. But there was more drama ahead, Harry had history of his own to write.

Mystery surrounded Guus Hiddink's plan for Harry. Would he be saved to use as a game breaker? As the Liverpool star continued to train on his own, concern grew.

Things turned quickly though. After joining his teammates in practice, Harry made an unexpected return against Liechtenstein. He was also fit enough to play Japan and Brazil – turning out for the entire match against Japan. As the results panned out, a draw against Croatia would be enough to secure a second round spot.

After going down 1-0 early, defender Craig Moore equalised with a penalty. Disaster struck again as Croatia went ahead with a second goal. Time was slipping away.

On 79 minutes Kewell hit a dramatic equaliser. Mark Bresciano crossed from the right, Aloisi flicked into the box for Harry to finish with a sweet, right-footed volley.

Captain Mark Viduka praised Harry's performance before adding, "We showed that we have the right spirit to do it... thank God, Harry was at the right place at the right time. What a beautiful goal." Harry himself, revelled. "It's the most important goal in my career so far. On a personal level, it's just unbelievable, but it's not really a personal thing. I enjoyed it for a split second, but it's a team performance. That goal I scored wasn't only for myself, it was for the whole team and the nation. The fans have supported us so much from day one. The crowd at the game was just superb and they are our 12th man."

Richie Young

ON THE BALL

Football News

TAKING ON THE WORLD

The Matildas and Young Matildas limber up ahead of major international fixtures

The Qantas Young Matildas are deep in preparations for the U-20 Women's World Championship in Russia, with less than two days to go before their opening match. The team has been grouped with hosts Russia, South American giants Brazil and familiar foes New Zealand, who they play first in St. Petersburg.

The squad has been training hard together in monthly training camps, looking to continue the momentum in Australian women's football after the Matildas' recent achievements at the Women's Asian Cup in Adelaide, and the third place achieved by Australia in the AFC U-19 Women's Championship in Malaysia in April.

For Young Matildas captain Sally Shipard, and teammates Lydia Williams, Leah Blayney, and Kylie Ledbrook, it has been a busy few weeks, having all been involved with the senior Matildas in the Women's Asian Cup. Despite their formidable opponents, expectations and confidence is high in at least reaching the knockout stages.

Meanwhile, the Matildas have been successful in qualifying for the 2007 FIFA World Cup finals to be held in China, after finishing in the top two at the recent AFC Women's Asian Cup. After beating Japan 2-0 in the semi-final, the Matildas were beaten in penalties in the final by China, with the score held at 2-2 at the end of extra time. Caitlin Munoz and Jo Peters were the Matilda's goal scorers but the side could not withstand a second-half attacking onslaught from the Chinese. The win was China's eighth AFC Women's Asian Cup title.

The Matildas are the first senior Australian team that has tried to qualify through the Asian Confederation - which has provided distinctly harder competition than their previous route through Oceania. Team captain Cheryl Salisbury hopes that Australians will be equally as enthralled in their exploits as they were for the Socceroos in Germany. The Matildas have previously played in World Cup finals in 1995, 1999 and 2003 and Salisbury believes her team are capable of lifting the trophy next year.

RIVAL TURF

Kuwaiti football fans are looking forward to a new era of watching the game, with the completion of their new 60,000-seat Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium less than a year away. The team's current home, the Kuwait National Stadium, holds just 16,000 people. Unfortunately the new venue will not be ready for next month's return match against the Qantas Socceroos. With more and more Socceroo matches scheduled in Asia though, it's only a matter of time before the Socceroos will run out onto Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium.

Photo: flickr.com/photos/imir/

A-LEAGUE Version 2.0

The exciting kick-off for the 2006/2007 Hyundai A-League is less than two weeks away, with a bumper round of games signalling the return of weekly top-class club football. Starting next Friday night (25 August) the Melbourne Victory host last season's minor premiers Adelaide United looking to spring a surprise. Melbourne will welcome the return of World Cup hero Archie Thompson following his stint in Holland with Dutch giants PSV.

Saturday night sees a clash of East meets West, when the Queensland Roar host Perth Glory and the return of a true hero of football in Australia. The Hyundai A-League and its fans will welcome the return to Australia of the Glory's Stan Lazaridis. Both teams will be hungry for points to put missing out on the play-offs last year behind them.

Finally, Sunday will see two new-look teams. The Newcastle Jets and New Zealand Knights clash across the Tasman, before the match of the round kicks off at 5pm right here at Aussie Stadium. The Central Coast Mariners will be desperate to avenge last year's painful grand final defeat and shock A-League champions Sydney FC.

For their part, the harbourside team have built an even more intimidating squad in the off-season. Their acquisitions include a new manager, Terry Butcher, and young hotshot Alex Brosque, who was outstanding last year for the Queensland Roar.

Photo: Jaron Busch

THE FAMILY

With the Asian Cup qualifiers well and truly here, members of the MyFootball Family have continued to reap the benefits. In July, members of the Football Family could exclusively secure tickets to this match as well as October's other Aussie Stadium fixture, against our main group rivals Bahrain, for a 20% discount.

With more international football on Australian shores just around the corner, check out **www.MyFootball.com.au** for more information on what's on offer!

LEBANON'S AC WITHDRAWAL

The Asian Football Confederation has accepted Lebanon's withdrawal from the Asian Cup. Lebanon were originally grouped with Australia, Kuwait and Bahrain in Group D. The withdrawal from the competition has come as a result of the ongoing military and political crisis that Lebanon is currently facing.

The AFC has also confirmed that no other changes will take effect - the top two sides from Group D will advance to compete in the 2007 Asian Cup finals.

Did you know...

- Aussie Stadium (formerly Sydney Football Stadium) was opened on 24 January 1988. It was a major Bicentennial project, with a construction cost of $68 million.
- In 2000 for the Sydney Olympics, Aussie Stadium hosted 10 football matches in seven days and saw 226,519 people pass through the gates.

FFT WELCOMES OUR BOYS HOME

FourFourTwo, Australia's premier football magazine, recently honoured World Cup Socceroo stars Lucas Neill and Tim Cahill with special awards at Sydney's Star City Casino. Publisher Andy Jackson [left] and editor Paul Hansford [right] presented Lucas with 'Socceroos Player of the Tournament' and commemorated Tim for scoring Australia's first ever goal at the FIFA World Cup. "What was really great was that the boys looked genuinely happy to receive the awards," says Hansford.

IN TOUCH WITH THE COMMUNITY

Telstra, in association with Football Federation Australia, is helping to consolidate Australian football's growing momentum with the Telstra Assistance Fund, a project providing equipment to Australia's junior football clubs. Telstra has been providing needy clubs with equipment sets featuring items such as balls, water bottles, first aid kits, bibs and markers up to the value of $1,000. One of the FFA's objectives is to create initiatives which will help ensure the Socceroos' success in the 2019 Asian Cup and beyond.

Did you know...

- In 2003, Robbie Williams set a ground attendance record for Aussie Stadium of 100,000 people in two concerts.

10 of the best at the SFS
(OR AUSSIE STADIUM)

Tonight's venue has seen some memorable and dramatic football match-ups. Take a quick trip down memory lane!

10 SYDNEY FC 1 – MELBOURNE VICTORY 1
Ushering in a new era in Australian football on 28 August last year, Sydney's first Hyundai A-League match drew a late crowd surge so large it forced the SCG Trust to open the gates, allowing some 1600 spectators in free. The only other time this has happened was for World Series Cricket in 1978.

9 AUSTRALIA 0 – ENGLAND 1
A friendly match on 1 June 1991 brought England legends David Platt, Gary Lineker and Stuart Pearce to Moore Park. However, it was Australian defender Ian Gray's own goal that won it for the visitors.

8 SYDNEY FC 2 – ADELAIDE UNITED 1
On 3 February 2006, this entertaining battle came towards the climax of the inaugural A-League season. A glorious late Alvin Ceccoli free-kick won it for Sydney, helping secure them a home final.

7 NORWAY 3 – USA 2
The gold medal match in the women's 2000 Olympic tournament saw Tiffeny Milbrett grab her second goal for the USA in injury time to make the score 2-2. The Norwegians were not to be defeated though. Dagny Mellgren scored in extra-time for a dramatic finish and chaotic scenes.

6 AUSTRALIA 7 – SOLOMON ISLANDS 0
Guus Hiddink's first competitive match in charge on 3 September 2005 saw the Socceroos blitz their Oceanic neighbours with a close to full strength side. Mark Viduka scored a first-half double.

5 AUSTRALIA 2 – NIGERIA 3
At the Sydney Olympics on 16 September, needing a draw to keep alive their gold medal hopes, the Olyroos fell two goals behind early on. Just before half-time though, a goal to Hayden Foxe, followed by one of the best Aussie team goals ever was finished off by Kasey Wehrman for the equaliser. After red cards to Brett Emerton and Celestine Babayaro, Nigeria scored midway through the second half and held on to knock the hosts out of the tournament.

4 AUSTRALIA 4 – ARGENTINA 1
An incredible 30-yard swerving free-kick from Charlie Yankos highlighted an extraordinary win for Australia in 1988 against an Argentina side containing legends such as Oscar Ruggeri and Diego Simeone.

3 AUSTRALIA 2 – CANADA 1 (Agg: 3-3, Aus. won 4-1 on pens)
Twelve years before he sent Australia to the World Cup with his penalty heroics, a young Mark Schwarzer kept Australia in the hunt for the 1994 World Cup and saved the country from the embarrassment of a Canadian victory with more spot-kick saves.

2 AUSTRALIA 1 – ARGENTINA 1
As World Cup USA '94 beckoned, Australia (and the 43,967 fans packed into the stadium) welcomed a Maradona-led Argentina to Sydney for the first leg of the play-off on 31 October 1993. An Aurelio Vidmar goal, assisted by brother Tony, gave Australia a 1-1 result that kept them in the tie.

1 SYDNEY 1 – CENTRAL COAST MARINERS 0
Steve Corica scored the winner in the A-League's first-ever grand final in front of 41,689 enthusiastic fans earlier this year. The noisy, colourful atmosphere ensured the 5 March match will go down as one of the major signposts in football's growing popularity in Australia.

Photo: Sam Grimmer

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KUWAIT

Small country, huge goals

Kuwait may be a fraction of Australia's size, but their football history is long and distinguished

By Jackson Gothe-Snape

THE STATE OF KUWAIT sits on the coast of the Persian Gulf, surrounded by Iraq to the north and Saudi Arabia to the south. Its total area is less than one-third that of Tasmania, with just two and a half million residents. Of those, just one million are Kuwaiti nationals.

In February, on the first match day for the Asian Cup qualifiers, Kuwait let slip a 1-0 lead away to Lebanon to draw 1-1, after Fahad Al Hamad missed a penalty early in the second half which would have made the score 2-0. This was the same day that Australia beat Bahrain in our first foray as an AFC nation.

In March, Kuwait were again held to a draw, this time 0-0 at home to Bahrain. With the top two sides in the group qualifying for the Asian Cup, Kuwait currently stand second in the group – still very much in the frame for qualification. The team will be looking to avoid defeat against the Socceroos. Word from inside the Kuwait camp is that they are hoping Australia will be complacent; still distracted by our recent World Cup exploits.

A proud history

Since joining FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation in 1962, Kuwait has proven itself a major regional force in football. The country has had nine victories in the Gulf Cup, a tournament held every two years featuring teams surrounding the Persian Gulf. World Cup veterans Saudi Arabia, in comparison, have won just three.

Kuwait have also performed well in the Asian Cup, winning the competition once, as hosts in 1980, and finishing in the top four on three other occasions. The early 1980s was a golden era for Kuwaiti football. In addition to winning the Asian Cup in 1980 and finishing third in the same tournament in 1984, Kuwait enjoyed their sole World Cup appearance in Spain in 1982 – the same World Cup that featured our Tasman rivals New Zealand.

In Spain, the Kuwaitis – as Asia's lone representatives – were grouped with European powers Czechoslovakia, France and England. After drawing 1-1 with the Czechs in the opening match, the team lost 4-1 to a French team featuring legend Michel Platini, and 1-0 to England.

Fond memories

Despite being 12,000 kilometres long, the trip to Australia will be a familiar one for some of the Kuwait squad. Numerous members of tonight's team performed strongly in the 2000 Olympic Football Tournament. For players such as forward Kalaf Al Mutairi and goalkeeper Nawaf Al Khaldi, their experiences at the 2000 Olympics will have left them with fond memories, even though the team failed to make it past the group stage.

In Brisbane in September 2000 the Kuwaitis began the tournament with a match against Cameroon. Despite an enthusiastic performance and with the score at 1-1 with 15 minutes to go, Kuwait could not pull off an upset. Late goals to African legend Patrick Mboma and Lauren, now an Arsenal star, earned Cameroon a 3-2 victory. Less than three weeks later, Cameroon lifted the Olympic trophy.

The Kuwaitis' second match was against a fearsome Czech Republic side that featured modern-day stars such as Milan Baros, Tomas Ujfalusi and Marek Jankulovski. Though falling behind

Kuwait prior to playing their Asian Cup qualifier against Bahrain in March

"The Kuwait side remains a formidable team, known for producing some of the most skilful, athletic players in Western Asia..."

FIRST TOUCH

- Founded: 1952
- Joined FIFA: 1962
- Joined AFC: 1962
- Honours: 9 Gulf Cups, 1 Asian Cup, 1 World Cup Finals appearance
- Most Caps: Wail Sulaiman Al Habashi (109)
- Most Goals: Jassem Al Houwaidi (63)
- Current FIFA Ranking: 100

early, Kuwait stormed back in the second half with three goals, the first from current striker Al Mutairi, to take the match 3-2.

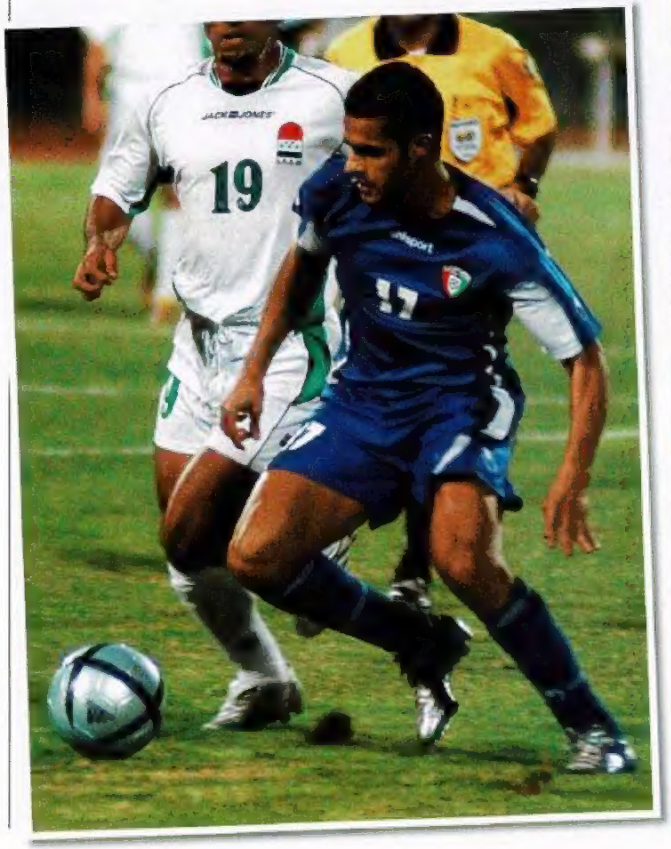
The group was to be decided by the final round of matches, when Kuwait met the USA in Melbourne needing at least a draw. Sadly for Kuwait, despite trailing by just a goal with minutes remaining, American football pin-up Landon Donovan scored to seal a 3-1 victory for the stars and stripes.

Tonight's battle

The Kuwait side remains a formidable team, known for producing some of the most skilful, athletic players in Western Asia - it is a game that the Socceroos must not approach lightly.

Having shaded their opening Asian Cup qualifiers against Lebanon and Bahrain, a lack of efficiency from Kuwait's strikers has been blamed on their lack of greater success thus far. Last year's retirement of Kuwaiti legend Bashar Abdullah in order to prolong his club career has left the national team lacking an incisive edge up front.

However, against group leaders Australia, Kuwait will face a stiffer challenge, particularly on the Aussie Stadium turf that is familiar to our A-League stars. A result for the Kuwaitis is likely to be earned by their defence, lead by captain Nohayr Al-Shamari. Tonight, Kuwait will be determined to earn a draw as a minimum against the more fancied home side. ■



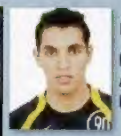
"Tonight, Kuwait will be determined to earn a draw as a minimum against the more fancied home side."

GOAL-FRENZY MEMORIES

Kuwait knocked China out of the 2006 World Cup in the qualifiers in dramatic fashion. Leading China on goal difference at the start of the day, Kuwait were favourites to go through as they were playing bottom-placed Malaysia. However, at half-time, and with Kuwait struggling at 1-1, China were leading the group on goal difference after going up 3-0 against Hong Kong. It was getting worse for Kuwait, as China scored another two goals by the 50th minute.

Then, a miracle happened for Kuwait. From the 60th minute, Kuwait slammed five past the Malays to make the final result 6-1. China finished up 7-0 winners but it was not enough, and Kuwait had qualified for the next round - on the same goal difference but having scored one more goal!

GOALKEEPERS



01
KHALED M. A. A. E ALRASHIDI
POSITION: GOALKEEPER

22
NAWAF KH. S. M. ALKHALDI
POSITION: GOALKEEPER

44
SHEHAB A. KANKONE
POSITION: GOALKEEPER

DEFENDERS

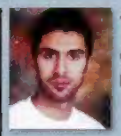
12
AHMAD S. A. E. ALEIDAN
POSITION: DEFENDER

30
FAHAD A. A SHAHEEN
POSITION: DEFENDER

04
NASER A. AL-HAJERI
POSITION: DEFENDER

05
NOHAYR M. Z. AL-SHAMARI
POSITION: DEFENDER

DEFENDERS



15
WALEED A. H. R JUMAH
POSITION: DEFENDER

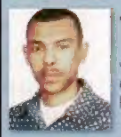
02
YAQOUB N. A. Y. T ABDULLAH
POSITION: DEFENDER

06
YOUSEF S. E. ZAYED
POSITION: DEFENDER

MIDFIELDERS

08
ABDULRAHMAN M. S. ALDAWOOD
POSITION: MIDFIELDER

43
HOSSAIN H. AL-SHAMMARI
POSITION: MIDFIELDER



18
JARAH M. H. M. H ALATAIQI
POSITION: MIDFIELDER

37
MOHAMMED F AL-MUTAIRI
POSITION: MIDFIELDER

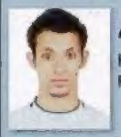
MIDFIELDERS

19
NAWAF M. H. F. N ALMUTAIRI
POSITION: MIDFIELDER

42
TAREQ M. Z. N ALSHAMARI
POSITION: MIDFIELDER

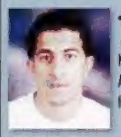
STRIKERS

17
BADER A. B. A. A ALMUTWA
POSITION: STRIKER



46
FAHAD A. ALRASHIDI
POSITION: STRIKER

20
FAHAD H. H. F ALHAMAD
POSITION: STRIKER



10
KHALAF M. M. S ALMUTAIRI
POSITION: STRIKER

38
NAWAF KH.AL-OTAIBI
POSITION: STRIKER

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The Jewel in the Crown

Are the Socceroos set to write another fine chapter in Australia's sporting history?

by Jackson Gothe-Snape

When Australia joined the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on 1 January 2006, many agreed the most valued reward would be a fairer qualification path to the World Cup. Having finally turned our backs on the ruthless two-leg play-off system, Australians can look forward to qualification through Asia. Beginning now though, the move represents so much more... we are on the path to the 2007 Asian Cup.

Eyes on the prize

Before joining the AFC, Socceroo supporters had a mere handful of meaningful international fixtures every four years. Australia's inclusion in AFC tournaments however, presents many more opportunities to support the Socceroos in full competitive internationals. Can we dare to dream that Australia will earn AFC Cup glory on its very first attempt?

With a total of 46 member nations the AFC is a football powerhouse, the populations of these nations equate to over half the world's population. Geographically, AFC nations cover half the globe. As the AFC's marquee competition, the Asian Cup comes with a rich history, millions of viewers, some of the world's most entertaining football and the football world's respect. The ambition to hold it aloft is what unites nations as distant and diverse as Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Japan and now Australia.

> "With a total of 46 member nations the AFC is a football powerhouse, the populations of these nations equate to over half the world's population."

Peter Velappan, Mohammed bin Hammam (AFC) and Zhang Jilong (Organising Committee) pose with the Asian Cup

Rich history

The Asian Cup was devised by the 12 members of the newly formed AFC in 1954 to help strengthen football in the region. Eventually held in Hong Kong in 1956 (50 years ago and in the same year as the Melbourne Olympic Games), the first competition featured seven of the AFC's member nations. Since then, the tournament has been held every four years with a range of competing nations, hosts and victors.

Korea and Israel dominated the first three Asian Cups, with Korea beating Israel into second place in the first two tournaments. As hosts, Israel came back to win in 1964 - less than 10 years later they left the AFC to become a member country of the European body UEFA.

The following three Asian Cup tournaments saw the emergence of Iran, who, aided by hosting the tournament in 1968 and 1976, won a record three consecutive trophies. Despite a total of nine World Cup appearances between them since, neither Korea nor Iran have managed to win another Asian Cup.

THE ENDS OF ASIA

Australia's entry into Asia is the latest change in the AFC's borders, but there have been others. In 2002, former member of the Soviet Union Kazakhstan left the AFC to be part of UEFA.

Even more odd is Israel's story. Originally a member of the AFC, the nation was not only runner-up in the first two Asian Cup tournaments, it was the host and victor in 1964.

Israel left the AFC in the 1970s but was not recognised as a full member nation of UEFA until 1994. Israel does not share a border with any UEFA nation, but does with Egypt, a member of the African confederation, and several AFC members.

Tonight's opponents

Kuwait has also enjoyed home advantage. As hosts in 1980, Kuwait celebrated their first Asian Cup victory, beating off Korea Republic 3-0 with a commanding performance in the final. The 1980s signalled the start of a new era, as in 1984 Saudi Arabia and Blue Samurai (Japan) dominance came to the fore. In every Asian Cup since, only Saudi Arabia and Japan have been crowned champions - Japan has been victorious in the last two tournaments (held in Lebanon in 2000 and China in 2004). Japan's first Asian Cup win came as hosts in 1992.

"Though the host nations are faced with some logistical difficulties, football fans from Asia and across the globe can look forward to another football feast."

The most recent Asian Cup - 2004 - was held in China where the hosts played their arch East Asian rivals Japan in the final. Astonishingly, some 300 million Chinese and close to 40 per cent of the Japanese viewing audience tuned in to watch a dramatic 3-1 victory for Japan. A staggering 450 million people watched the final. Comparatively only 24 million people - a fraction of the world's population - saw Greece win Euro 2004.

The Asian Cup is watched by viewers in 120 countries and is easily the single-biggest sporting event in Asia. In comparison, the 2005 AFL Grand Final in 2005 reached an audience of 3.4 million, while the third Rugby League State of Origin match this year attracted about 2.4 million.

[Inset left] AFC President Mohammed bin Hammam with FIFA President Sepp Blatter. [Above] AFC General Secretary Peter Velappan

How it works

To accommodate the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the AFC are breaking with tradition and holding the next Asian Cup in 2007. In an unprecedented move, four countries have been given hosting duties: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Though the host nations are faced with some logistical difficulties, football fans from Asia and across the globe can look forward to another football feast.

Sixteen teams qualify for the Asian Cup, divided into four groups of four. As automatic qualifiers, the hosts together have already occupied a quarter of the available slots. The current qualification rounds will produce the other 12 competitors, with the top two teams in each of the six groups qualifying for the finals.

In Kuwait and Bahrain, Australia has just two group opponents following Lebanon's withdrawal from Group D.

Beyond 2007, Australia's future in the Asian Cup looks bright. With one eye on proving we can host major football tournaments, there is an excellent chance that Australia will host an Asian Cup before too long. So, in addition to years of quality matches, we can look forward to welcoming the stars of Asia - players like Bayern Munich and Iran's Ali Karimi, Celtic and Japan's Shunsuke Nakamura and Manchester United and Korea's Park Ji-Sung - to Australia. ■

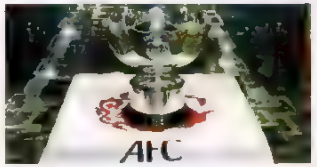
HOME COMFORTS

When Germany came close to a World Cup victory in July, they did so riding massive home support. In World Cup history, hosting the tournament has proven to be a massive advantage for the home side. Of the 18 World Cups held, five of the winners have been the home team, almost one winner in every three. In the Asian Cup however, the effect of hosting the tournament is even greater. In the 13 Asian Cups held, five of the winners have also been hosts. With four hosts for the 2007 tournament, it could soon be six.

MIYAMOTO MIND GAMES

Though winners in 2004, Japan [above] were lucky to survive their quarter-final match against Jordan. Tied 1-1 at the end of extra time, the match went to penalties. In the pressure of the shootout, Japanese players Shunsuke Nakamura and Alex missed their kicks, while Jordan converted their first. Japan captain Miyamoto, teammates in support; then approached Malaysian referee Subkhiddin Mohammed Salleh and shared a heated exchange about the state of the penalty spot.

In an unprecedented move, despite the conditions being identical for both sides, the referee marched them to the other end of the pitch where they would hold the remaining kicks. Though Jordan scored their next kick, that piece of gamesmanship from Miyamoto contributed to a swing in momentum. Japan snuck through 4-3 on penalties. In the semi-finals Japan needed another miracle; landing two goals in injury time to beat Bahrain 4-3.



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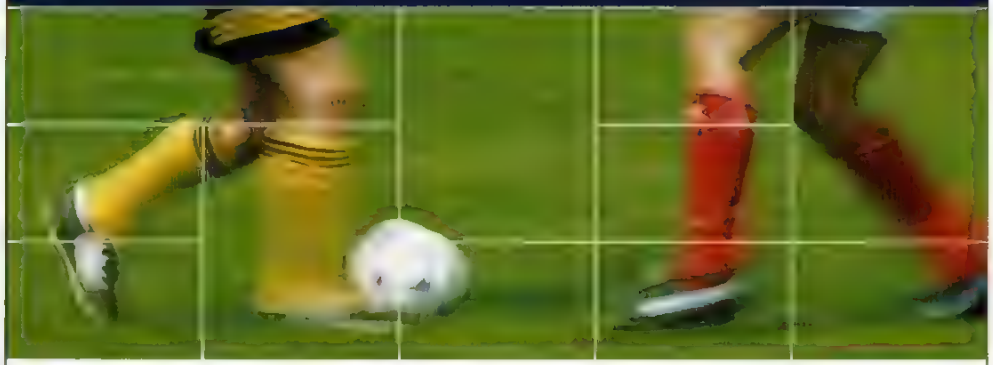

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Football Federation Australia is one of many national sporting organisations that has formed a winning partnership with the Australian Sports Commission to develop its sport in Australia.

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LUCAS NEILL

THE ROCK

Lucas Neill shone on the world stage, but is now looking forward to the Socceroos flexing their muscles in Asia

by Richie Young
(interviews by Paul Hansford and Aidan Ormond)

NO AUSTRALIAN will ever forget the Socceroos' four heart-wrenching matches in Germany. As one of the most inexperienced sides in the World Cup, international critics did not expect the Socceroos to reach the knockout stage. Of course, everyone involved in the team had other ideas and worked feverishly to create their own destiny. By seeing off Japan and Croatia to reach the Round of 16, the team made their mark.

Amongst it all was Lucas Neill. Now a household name, it was Lucas' brilliant performances in defence, as well as in attacking phases that earned him so much attention and heaped praise. Even Tim Cahill is a fan of his teammate. "I was definitely not surprised by the way Lucas performed in the World Cup. It was a big stage, he's a big player and he stood up to the plate every game. He was by far the best player in our team and I think one of the best defenders in the tournament. Anyone who watched our games could see that."

With the infamous end to Australia's match against Italy, Lucas' passion and competitive drive will be etched in our minds forever. Now Lucas says his attention is well and truly entrenched in winning next year's Asian Cup, despite the fact that his club commitments in Blackburn prevented him from playing in tonight's qualifier.

"Any player wants to hold up trophies and the next cup to look forward to is the Asian Cup. We'll go into it as one of

the favourites and what better way to celebrate being part of Asia than to be standing on the podium with the trophy at the end," says Neill.

With Australia's move to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), the team's recent performances and their increased attention on the home front, Neill is relishing his time in the green and gold and says it's a prime time for football to take hold in Australia.

"It's an exciting time to be part of this team because we have the momentum, great belief and confidence. I think after beating Japan and being considered favourites for the Asian Cup we've got to qualify... and then go over there and deliver. It's a massive tournament. To pick up silverware in a tournament like that would be absolutely phenomenal. The standard will be really high and there'll be more at stake.

"There'll be a general improvement in the team because you'll have to be the best every time you play. That's the best though, because it's the way you want to play competitive tournaments. As a nation [because of the Asian Cup], we'll just become stronger and stronger. It's the first of many, let's hope. But for now it's important to be business as usual and getting the qualification down."

"Our team was awesome. We all had the same goal in mind which was to do our best for our country so no one was playing for himself."

Lucas, in true ambitious fashion, has set the team's chances to actually win the Asian Cup high. He believes the World Cup, and the confidence-boosting victory over Japan holds the team in good stead for 2007. He also believes that Australia's standing means that it should no longer fear any other national side, but continue to approach all opponents seriously, like they did against Brazil.

"More often than not you'll only worry about a team in the lead-up to the game. Even then, it's not a case of getting too carried away with the opposition... it's more a matter of educating yourself to know their strengths and weaknesses and to be aware of certain situations. You've got to be sure that your strengths are put to use in the game and find the best way to exploit your opponents. We did it with the biggest teams and we're not going to change it."

Another positive thing to emerge from Germany is the team spirit that many Socceroos spoke of. The high morale and happy culture can indeed be credited to the team's strong showing. Considering our come-from-behind performances against Japan, Croatia and Holland (in the pre-World Cup friendly) the team worked hard together, as well as developing their own strong bonds.

Lucas reckons that the Socceroo spirit is unlike any other he has experienced in a team environment. "Our team was awesome. We all had the same goal in mind which was to do our best for our country so no one was playing for himself. No one cared who got the glory, we were all in it together. No one was bigger than anyone else and as a result it created a family atmosphere. It was very unique."

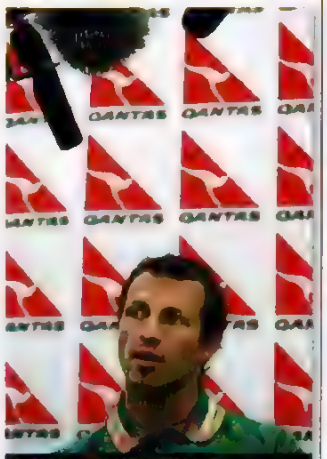
While Lucas says the Socceroos side under Guus Hiddink was unique and one he already misses, he is also optimistic about what the next manager will bring. "We had a great 'father' in Guus Hiddink who adopted a similar attitude to us in that he had something to prove as well. I miss his style and his wisdom. But it just makes me even hungrier to be involved with teams that are lead by top coaches all the time.

"I think [the next manager] is going to be a manager who's going to come in with the hunger and desire to want to make a difference. The same way Guus came in, with a massive challenge in front, and he wanted to win. He wanted to make the difference. The next manager will have to want to keep all that good work done. Just keep the momentum going. The squad is there. The attitude is there. There's definitely strength and depth but it's also about having discipline in the structure. That's the biggest thing we need to continue."

With the international futures of a number of Socceroos still in the balance, including captain Mark Viduka, some have suggested Lucas is the next logical player to wear the arm band. The idea has not gone away, at least until Viduka decides to announce his international playing future. For his part, Lucas does not want to be drawn into the issue.

When asked about whether the captaincy is something he is aiming for he responds: "I'm not going to entertain it because... it's the greatest honour but I'd like to see Mark stay on and I'd like to see Craig Moore stay on and they'd be the first two picks. So until they actually hang up their boots I won't worry about it. On the flipside I would jump at the chance to lead my country out. Arm band or no arm band – I'll show leadership qualities on and off the field."

While Lucas has plenty of blokes singing his praises for his performances and sportsmanship, his raised profile amongst female fans has not gone unnoticed either. When pressed on his thoughts as one of Australia's newest sex symbols, Lucas laughs shyly. "It's not why I play the game! I think I've had just as many guys as girls come up and congratulate me and tell me how proud they are to watch the Australian team. It's that which gives me a great feeling of responsibility and achievement. Myself and the team have touched the hearts of so many people." ■



VITAL STATISTICS
Born: 9 March, 1978, Sydney, Australia
Height: 183 cms
Weight: 77 kgs
Debut: v Saudi Arabia (D0-0), Riyadh, October 1996
Last Match: v Italy (L1-0), Kaiserslautern (GER), June 2006

RIGHT BACK IN THE ACTION

Mark Milligan, Sydney FC's spirited defender is loving his rise to the Qantas Socceroos

by Richie Young

When Australia's World Cup squad was announced in May this year, two Hyundai A-League heroes made the list. Mark Milligan and Michael Beauchamp, along with striker Josh Kennedy, were regarded by some as shock selections. While only Kennedy made the field against World Cup opponents, all three made distinct impressions on the Socceroo team management.

For Mark Milligan, his inclusion has given him an insatiable taste for the world stage. Mark, a U-20 Australia representative says his experience with the senior Socceroos has made him hungry for more. Next on his agenda is getting his hands on the Asian Cup...

After getting the call-up to the national side, what was your experience like in Germany?
It was a great experience. Leading into the World Cup I didn't really expect to be called up so when I did, I think I was more shocked than the public!

It was the whole experience... being around players of that caliber every day. Getting to have lunch with Mark Viduka and Craig Moore you hear about all their experiences, and on the pitch... you just learn so much. There are so many little things that change you as a player. Things like confidence, positioning... all the small things that fine-tune you. Those guys do things perfectly, and they rub off on you. You learn without really knowing it. And to be coached by Guus was just unbelievable.

How did the established members of the team treat you?
They were all brilliant. Right from the first game in Melbourne (the Powerade Cup against Greece) when they all came in they just introduced themselves straight up.

I got on really well with Stan Lazaridis. He's a great guy - we had a lot of chats about things other than football as well. He was really good to myself and Michael Beauchamp especially. But all of them... they were all more than happy to sit down and have a chat. I can't really single anyone out! The older boys were just brilliant to us, so we never felt out of place at all.

You have said you learnt a lot at the World Cup, about things such as diet. How did that help?
It was always great food. They gave us a wide range of things to choose from. Watching guys like Mark Bresciano - he

is just the ultimate professional. You learn how much you need to get the right energy and to get you through two training sessions. Getting the proportions right to get you at the correct weight as well, that's another thing I picked up.

We all ate a lot. I think there was actually a comment made by the chef about how much we ate.

Can you tell us a little more about the team spirit we heard about?
It's hard to explain. It was things like it didn't matter which table you sat at during dinner – everyone got on. I guess because it's an Aussie team, because a lot of the players don't get to see each other a lot – when they do get together they just want to catch up. So I guess it's like a reunion in some ways. It's not a surprise to Australian people how well we did. You sort of had the feeling we were going to be successful because of the unity in the side.

What happened in camp when you weren't training?
We had a common room with a fussbal table, ping-pong and things like that. But our schedules were so busy, we only had about two days off to see our families, so we spent most of our time resting up to get our energy back. We rested a lot because we were training so much but we had things to amuse us. A couple of boys had their Xboxs and PlayStations as well, so we were always entertained.

What do you know about the Kuwait side you'll be facing tonight?
I've heard they're well-organised, run hard and work hard for everything. There are some similar characteristics in other Asian sides and I've played teams from [the region] coming up through youth levels as well. You can even take our Australian team for example, we try and play the same way right through the 17s to the Seniors. It's so the consistency in the way you talk and the way you run is the same. They're definitely not going to be easy beats [tonight]. They'll make our lives very hard.

Assuming we qualify, are the Socceroos a realistic chance of winning the Cup?
Oh, absolutely. Personally after my inclusion in the World Cup team, it's very high on my list of priorities to cement my position. It's definitely a realistic goal to take it out and something we believe we can achieve. I guess we have proved to ourselves that we can do it, and that's probably something that was missing in the past few years.

Do you think we'll see many of the European-based Socceroos back home through the qualifying stages to reach next year's tournament?
We had a chat in Melbourne about the availability and we want to get as many of the World Cup boys back as we can. It's just so hard with all the traveling involved and the club commitments. At the end of the tournament the general feeling was that we'd be catching up again at various stages through the qualifiers.

Do you already have the 2010 World Cup in South Africa in the back of your mind?
Yes. We've got four games coming up to the end of the year and then we've got the Asian Cup next year so looking forward, our schedules are a lot busier which is only going to help us. We're getting those quality games that we were lacking in the past.

Have you found you get recognised a lot more now?
I went up to the fish and chip shop to buy my grandparents some fish and chips the other day and this little kid tugged on my shirt and said, "are you Mark Milligan?" That was a bit of a buzz!

Back at Sydney FC, do you think your role in the club will change now that you're playing for Australia?
No, not really. It hasn't really changed. I was lucky enough to be given the experience to go to the World Cup. It was a great honour that doesn't happen to everyone. I wouldn't say there is added pressure but then I guess there is more expectation. I've spoken to Crooky [Ian Crook] and Terry Butcher about it and I just have to come back and play my game. Butcher sat me down and said, "you've been to the World Cup and you got there playing the way you play. There's no need to change anything..." That is so true. I'm just going to go out and be myself. Play week in week out, the best I can.

What does playing for Australia mean to you?
It's hard to explain. It doesn't matter if its junior or senior level, there's just no feeling like standing out there with the Aussie uniform on and listening to that national anthem. It's unbelievable. I'm very, very patriotic. I love my country and it really does send shivers down your spine. ■

> "There's just no feeling like standing out there with the Aussie uniform on and listening to that national anthem. It's unbelievable."

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: 4 August, 1985, Sydney, Australia
Height: 178 cm
Weight: 79 kg
Debut: v Liechtenstein (W3-1), Ulm (GER), June 2006
Last Match: v Liechtenstein (W3-1), Ulm (GER), June 2006

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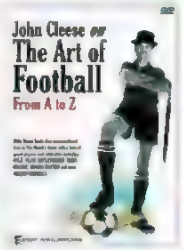

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STEVE CORICA

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Tonight's match marks the return of fan favourite Steve Corica. With a distinguished national career behind him, the Sydney FC star has set his sights on even more glory

by Richie Young

COMPARED TO the Socceroos World Cup squad, tonight's line-up brings a distinctly A-League feel. With our local stars making up the squad, the team is a hybrid of youth, flair and proven experience. Many players on show will be future World Cup heroes, and are determined to cement their roles within the side.

While Archie Thompson, Stan Lazaridis and Mark Milligan have returned with the experience of Germany still fresh, it is the likes of Steve Corica and Kevin Muscat who will bolster the side. Both are experienced campaigners, having represented Australia throughout the 90s.

Muscat, who most famously scored the penalty against Uruguay in the first leg of the 2001 World Cup play-off, has appeared 50 times for the Socceroos. He also played for Australia last year and was considered unlucky not to be included in the World Cup squad.

Cairns-born Steve Corica on the other hand, has not pulled on the green and gold since 2001. The versatile winger has made 40 appearances for the Socceroos, and first represented Australia at schoolboy level in 1988. Corica's return to Aussie shores has proved a masterstroke. *The Socceroo* caught up with the highly-respected legend...

Congratulations on your call-up to the Socceroos! Did you have an inkling you would be back in the national team so soon?
Not really... only a couple of days ago when I was told really! It's a good time. I haven't played for Australia for about five years. It's an exciting time for me.

Your form in last season's Hyundai A-League was impressive though... you felt unlucky not to be in the World Cup squad didn't you?
Yeah, I thought I might have had a chance in the squad. Obviously I missed out and now I've got another game and opportunity here to look forward to.

What did you make of the team's performances in Germany?
I watched them all and really enjoyed them. I thought we did a fantastic job. I was a little bit disappointed about the way we went out obviously against Italy, but in the end they're the world champions and to say we got beaten by the world champions isn't bad. I thought we put in great performances in all the four games we played.

You must be looking forward to being back in camp...
Yes I am. I'll get to have a good chat to Arnie there about my role. We'll be in camp for four days in Melbourne before the match.

Are you expecting the side to go out and attack?
I'd say so. You know... we're at home and you want to put on some entertaining football for the crowd as well. I think it's sold out and it'd be nice to be able to entertain and win the game.

What do you know of the Kuwait side?
Not much. Really nothing actually! I'm sure Graham will find out what they're about and we'll work hard on figuring out how to beat them while in camp.

Have you thought about lifting the Asian Cup next year?
Not yet! It hasn't crossed my mind, you just want to take one game at a time. Obviously if they get all the Socceroos back from overseas it'll be really a strong team, and they've got a great chance.

What have been your best memories playing for the Socceroos?
Oh! There's just been so many. Obviously playing in the Olympic Games was special for me, I played in two Olympics... I played in the Confederations Cup as well. We beat the world champions at the time France, and Brazil in that same tournament. Those would be my main highlights.

Have you had a chance yet to speak with your Sydney FC teammates who also made the squad?
Yeah I've spoken to them. They're all looking forward to it as well. Having so many players in the Socceroo team is obviously great for Sydney FC and fantastic for all of us. ■

SOCCEROO HONOURS

STEVE CORICA (SIX GOALS)
1993 - Vitesse Arnhem, Borussia Dortmund, Dukburg, De Graafschap, MEC Nijmegen (1 goal), Kuwait, Kuwait, South Korea, South Korea, Colo Colo, Catolica
1995 - Colombia, Colombia, Japan (1 goal), Ghana, Ghana, Argentina
1996 - Scotland, Saudi Arabia
1997 - Macedonia
1999 - World Stars, Brazil B
2000 - Chile (1 goal), Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Paraguay, Cook Islands (1 goal), Solomon Islands
2001 - Colombia (1 goal), Tonga, Fiji (1 goal), Mexico, France, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, Japan

KEVIN MUSCAT (TEN GOALS)
1993 - Catolica
1994 - Kuwait, Malaysia Under-23
1995 - Argentina
1996 - Japan, Sweden, Sweden, Chile, Saudi Arabia
1997 - Hungary (1 goal), Tahiti, Solomon Islands, Tunisia, Uruguay, Brazil
1998 - Croatia
1999 - World Stars, Brazil B, Brazil B
2000 - Hungary, Czech Republic, Paraguay, Paraguay, Paraguay, Cook Islands (2 goals), Solomon Islands (1 goal), Vanuatu (1 goal), New Zealand, Scotland
2001 - Tonga (4 goals), American Samoa, Fiji, Samoa, Mexico, France, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, New Zealand, France, Uruguay (1 goal), Uruguay
2003 - England, Jamaica
2004 - Venezuela, Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands
2005 - New Zealand, Germany, Argentina

ONE TO WATCH

HE'S LEFT, HE'S DEFT

Canberra born and raised Kaz Patafta is another ace in Australia's bright future

by Richie Young

IN GUUS HIDDINK'S short tenure at the helm of the Australian national team, the public quickly learnt about his reputation. He proved his worth as both a master tactician and a brilliant motivator. Hiddink was able to develop a happy and winning culture in his Socceroo squad. It seemed there was little he could do wrong.

In 2005, when he first saw Kaz Patafta in camp with the Socceroos, football followers got a glimpse of Guus' celebrated ability to spot young talent. While most fans first took note of the diminutive Patafta (he stands at 172cms) when he joined the Socceroos squad in Germany, others had already noted that he was included in the train-on squad which played against Uruguay in November 2005.

Hiddink was an instant fan and even made moves to secure Patafta for a coveted move to his club side PSV Eindhoven. Patafta though, eventually signed with Portuguese giants Benfica - who had already been courting him for some time.

Patafta is a left-footed offensive midfielder, and joins a list of other sublime Australian left footers (John Aloisi, Harry Kewell and Stan Lazaridis are all recognised lefties).

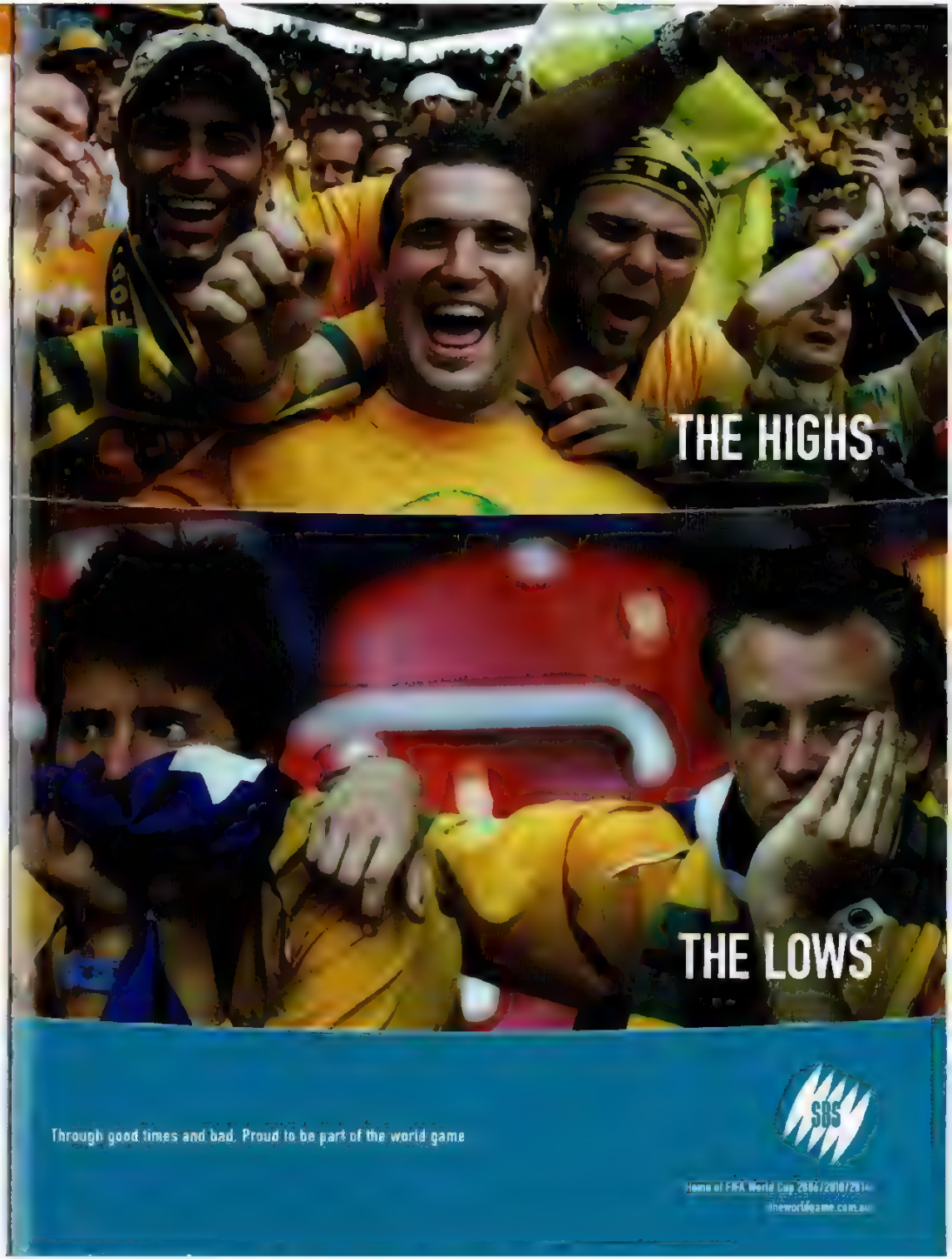
A Joeys captain, Patafta has already turned out for the Young Socceroos (U-20s), is a former AIS scholarship holder and was named as Soccer Canberra U-15 Player of the Year in 2002. Unsurprisingly, Patafta's ambitions lie squarely with national success. He has said that his time with the senior players in Germany puts him in good stead and aims to be a team regular for the 2010 World Cup.

In Germany, Kaz was optimistic in his outlook for the future of the Australian side. "Calling us up for this camp shows that Australia is now getting serious about our youth players. We're the next generation," he said.

Physically, Kaz is still expected to develop - so his power will become even more impressive and his experience in Portugal will expose him to a number of playing styles. Lucas Neill, along with many other Socceroos, has voiced encouragement for his young colleague.

"Kaz is an excellent young player. Very nimble feet and has a lot of South American flair. I hope he and Neil [Kilkenny] mature as players and stay hungry and keep their feet on the ground. Both will be great assets for the Australian national team." ■

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: 25 October 1988, Canberra ACT
Club: Benfica, Portugal
(Current) Height: 172 cm



SHOOT 'N' SCORE!

2 When was the nickname 'Socceroo' first used?

3 How many 'A Internationals' did Alex Tobin appear in for the national side?

4 Which sporty 1950s skipper was also pretty handy at rugby league, tennis, cricket and athletics?

5 Australia was knocked out of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics by which nation?

6 What year in the 1970s were the Young Socceroos formed?

7 Who coached the national side during the 1974 World Cup campaign?

8 Which 1980s star striker is also a qualified hairdresser?

9 In which year did Mark Viduka make his international debut?

10 Which 1990s Socceroo spent three months in Hollywood in a bid for acting stardom?

11 Which former Socceroo's shot on goal injured TV personality Wilbur Wilde on the set of *Hey Hey it's Saturday* in the 1990s?

12 Aussie legend Alex Tobin wasn't just a hero on the pitch. He also beat the opposition on which game show back in the 1990s?

13 Which newly capped Socceroo was a ball boy at the Australia v Iran World Cup Qualifier back in 1997?

14 In 2000, the Matildas became the first Aussie football team to appear in a Japanese TV commercial. What were they advertising?

15 How many goals did world record holder Archie Thompson score in one match in 2001?

16 In which minute did Tim Cahill score Australia's first ever World Cup goal against Japan in Germany earlier this year?

17 In the first leg play-off against Uruguay in 2001, who took the penalty kick at the MCG?

18 Who played as goalkeeper in the second leg play-off against Iran in 1997?

19 What was the score when Australia played Japan on Valentine's Day in 1996?

20 In 2003, Max Vieri made his debut for the Socceroos. Which country did he face?

21 Who scored Australia's lone goal in the Powerade Cup against Greece on 25 May 2006?

22 Which member of the World Cup Socceroo management side has recently been appointed manager of Perth Glory?

23 What was the score when Australia beat Bahrain in their first Asian Cup qualifying match on 22 February 2006?

24 How many players make up a World Cup squad?

25 "Australia played Uruguay in the 70s and beat them." True or false?

26 Who were the three goal scorers when Australia beat England 3-1 on 12 February 2003?

27 In what year did the Australian national team play their first match? Against who?

28 Whose feet are pictured below?

ANSWERS!

1: Ernie Tapai 2: During the 1970 World Cup qualification campaign 3: 87 times 4: Bob Bignell 5: India 6: 1977 7: Rale Rasic 8: Eddie Krncevic 9: 1994 10: Andrew Bernal 11: Paul Wade 12: Sale of the Century "Battle of the Codes" 13: Scott McDonald 14: Toothpaste 15: Thirteen against American Samoa 16: 84th 17: Kevin Muscat 18: Mark Bosnich 19: 3-0 20: Turkey 21: Josip Skoko 22: Ron Smith 23: 3-1 24: 23 25: True (they won 2-0 on 27 April 1974) 26: Tony Popovic, Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton 27: 1922 against New Zealand 28: Archie Thompson/Alex Brosque/Stan Lazaridis/Mark Viduka

Meet the Socceroos

FourFourTwo runs the rule over Graham Arnold's squad selected for Australia's first Asian Cup match on home soil

by Aidan Ormond

AUSTRALIA

TONIGHT'S MATCH is not only a significant one for the Football Federation Australia; it also marks a career milestone for a number of players set to make their international debuts.

Of the 22 players named for the train-on squad, eight players had not yet appeared for the senior national side. This list includes all train-on players, with a final squad of 18 appearing in tonight's qualifier match.

This team is evidence the Hyundai A-League has quality players able to compete at top-class level. With the inclusion of World Cup members Stan Lazaridis, Mark Milligan and Archie Thompson; the side also welcomes the return and experience of Kevin Muscat and Steve Corica. Additionally Alvin Ceccoli, Jade North, Alex Brosque, Michael Valkanis and David Carney also travelled to Australia's first Asian Cup qualifier against Bahrain in February earlier this year.

Of the A-League clubs, all are represented tonight with the exception of the New Zealand Knights. Inaugural A-League winners Sydney FC has the most representatives with eight players, while there is also a distinct Adelaide United feel with coach John Kosmina assisting Graham Arnold.

GOALKEEPERS

Clint Bolton

AGE: 30
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 3

Ten years ago, Clint was part of a strong Olyroos squad at the Atlanta 1996 Olympics. Now, he has a chance to cement a spot in the national team after last making an appearance for the Socceroos in 2001. Bolton is one of the most consistent 'keepers on the domestic scene and has enjoyed a stellar career in Australian club football. He won two grand finals in the NSL (with Brisbane Strikers and Sydney Olympic) and was part of the first ever A-League grand final win for Sydney FC. His performance for his club at last year's Club World Championships showed why he is so highly rated. Clint is an AIS graduate and represented Australia at the World Youth Championships in 1995.

Danny Vukovic

AGE: 21
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

At such a young age, Danny Vukovic could be on the Socceroo team sheet for the next three World Cup campaigns. The young 'keeper enjoyed a breakthrough season last year with the Central Coast Mariners where he replaced experienced, and injured, glovesman John Crawley. He didn't let the team down as they went on to play in the grand final here at Aussie Stadium. Vukovic's fantastic form in the A-League was rewarded with a spot as a Socceroo train-on player for the Greece friendly last May. Danny is brave, powerful and commands his backline with an authority that belies his years. He is now pushing Ante Covic and others, and ensures our goalkeeping stocks remain in good hands.

DEFENDERS

Kevin Muscat

AGE: 31
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 30

Kevin is a legend of football and one of our fiercest leaders on the park. After a stint at the AIS, Muscat was part of our 1991 youth side before going on to captain the Australian U-20s to a famous semi-final finish in the World Youth Championships of 1993. The attacking defender also went on to play for the Olyroos in 1996. He was a regular in the national team for a decade up until the 2005 Confederations Cup, which was his last appearance in the green and gold. The Victorian star had an excellent club career in UK football, playing for Wolves, Crystal Palace, Sheffield United, Millwall and in Scotland with Rangers. He currently stars in the A-League with Melbourne Victory.

Michael Valkanis

AGE: 31
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Michael is considered one of the toughest defenders in the A-League and has a great knack of scoring goals, too. Last season, the fearless Reds powerhouse scored three times for his club Adelaide. Although he is Australian based these days, Valkanis has played most of his senior career in Greece; first with Irakilis, Larissa then Agios Nikolaos over an eight year period from 1995. Prior to that, he was part of the successful South Melbourne squad of the early 90s. Michael was called up to the Socceroos squad last February against Bahrain in the side's opening Asian Cup match in Manama, although he didn't see any game time.

Alvin Ceccoli

AGE: 32
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Alvin has long been known as one of the best left-sided defenders in this country. He also has a penchant for scoring important goals. Interestingly, he made his Socceroo debut eight years ago in the Oceania Nations Cup tournament in Brisbane, and it's taken him until early in 2006 to appear in the green and gold again (against Bahrain in February where he played a full game). His club career has been very successful, having won two championships with Wollongong Wolves in the NSL and one A-League trophy with Sydney FC. He also had a brief spell in Greek club football where he scored one of the season's most spectacular goals for AEK Athens in 1999.

Mark Milligan

AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Milligan may have missed the A-League grand final, but he got one of the coveted spots in the Socceroo squad for the World Cup. Considered one of the brightest prospects on the local scene, he was part of a strong Young Socceroo squad for the 2005 World Youth Cup in Holland. Another Sydney FC player who should feel right at home playing at Aussie Stadium, the experience of training with the likes of Craig Moore and Lucas Neill in Germany will have done the former Northern Spirit and Parramatta Eagles defender a world of good. Milligan is another player who's likely to feature in Socceroo squads for many campaigns to come.

AUSTRALIA

DEFENDERS

Stan Lazaridis

AGE: 34
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: PERTH GLORY (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 87

Happy birthday, Stan! And what better way to celebrate your 34th b rthday than by playing for your nation in an important international? Although "Laza" didn t see any game time in Germany, Socceroo supremo Graham Arnold is a big admirer of the former Birmingham City, West Ham and West Adela de defender, who can also attack down the left with speed and great skill in one-on-one situations
The West Australian flyer is not expected to be part of the campaign for the 2010 World Cup, but short term, his experience will be vital in guiding our younger players through some tricky Asian Cup encounters.

Adrian Leijer

AGE: 20
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE V.CTORY (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

Adrian is another one of the talented youngsters at Melbourne Victory who is destined for great things in the green and gold. At just 20, this star-in-the-making has time on his side. With this in mind, the powerful central defender was one of the Socceroo "train-on" players for the May friendly against Greece in Melbourne where he was able to see up close our number-one choice central defenders
Leijer was also part of our Young Socceroos squad for the 2005 World Youth Championships. He made his debut as a teenager in the NSL with Melbourne Knights three seasons ago before being picked up by his hometown A-League club.

Iain Fyfe

AGE: 24
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

Iain was part of that famous U-17 squad that reached the final of the World Youth Championships in New Zealand seven years ago. Fyfe actually came on as a late substitute in the final against Brazil's future stars (which featured Kaka, Adriano and Anderson). He also appeared in the Young Socceroos squad two years later.
The defender began his club career in South Australia with Adelaide City in the old NSL before moving to Sydney Olympic then Sydney FC in the A-League (with a brief spell in Scottish football in between). Fyfe is one of the most consistent defenders in the A-League and if he plays tonight, will make his debut for the Socceroos.

Alex Wilkinson

AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

Alex Wilkinson, a towering defender for the Central Coast Mariners in the Hyundai A-League, was thrilled to be called into the Socceroo train-on squad following the unexpected injury and withdrawal of Spase Dilevski
After progressing through our national junior ranks, Wilkinson has plenty of international experience but has not yet made his senior side debut. Wilkinson has played for Australia at U-17 and U-20 level and played a leading role for the country at the 2003 FIFA World Youth Championships. With his confidence now growing, Alex is tipped to be regular in Australia's backline for years to come.

MIDFIELDERS

Jade North

AGE: 24
POSITION: DEFENDER/MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 12

Mobile, versatile and an excellent defender, North fits the bill for the modern Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets right back has been recognised at national level accordingly, having played for our national U-17's, U-20s, U-23s as well as the senior side over the last seven years. North grew up in Taree, NSW but began his senior club career in Queensland with the Brisbane Strikers in the old NSL aged just 16. He progressed to Sydney Olympic where he won a grand final in 2002. North is the only current player in the Socceroo squad with an indigenous background and has been recognised by the Aboriginal community for his contribution to sport.

David Carney

AGE: 22
POSITION: ATTACKING MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Like Brett Emerton, Carney is from the Campbelltown area in Sydney. And like the Socceroo flyer, he loves to run at defenders from wide positions with pace. The Sydney FC man was called up for his first Aussie cap against Bahrain earlier this year (he came on for Scott McDonald in the final 10 minutes). And if the wide midfielder wants any inspiration, he need only think back to his days alongside friend Wayne Rooney in the Everton youth team, before the Englishman burst onto the Premier League scene in 2003. What's more, Carney used to go to school with Sydney FC and Socceroo teammate Alex Brosque, and the pair are ready to spearhead the Socceroos' Asian Cup campaign.

Travis Dodd

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Travis is another player ready to make his national team debut, although he was part of the Joeys squad 10 years ago. The Adelaide United wide midfielder is quick, and at 26, is peaking at the right time for his national team ambitions. He loves running at defences from deep and can score goals (he has four to his name from last season with United). Apart from stints in recent years in Malaysia and at Panionios in Greece – where Travis scored in their UEFA Cup first round victory over Udinese – he has spent his career in Australian club football with Adelaide City, Parramatta Power and Newcastle Breakers. Travis made his senior club debut at the age of just 16 with Adelaide City.

Matt McKay

AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: QUEENSLAND ROAR (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

Matt is a hungry and hard-working midfielder who was one of the stars of Queensland Roar's first A-League campaign. McKay combines well at club level with Spase Dilevski on the left side of midfield and last season he was teammates with another of tonight's Socceroos, Alex Brosque. Three years ago, McKay played the full 90 minutes for the Young Socceroos in an unforgettable 3-2 victory over Brazil in Dubai in the World Youth Championships. The Brisbane-born dynamo - who began playing when he was five - was the National Youth League's player of the year in 2001. Nicknamed "Possum", McKay is now a 'Roo!

MIDFIELDERS

Kristian Sarkies

AGE: 19
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

What a superstar Kristian Sarkies is going to be. Only 19, he was deemed good enough to make his debut under Guus Hiddink a few months ago in the Socceroos' final pre-World Cup game against Lichtenstein. A member of the Young Socceroos' World Cup campaign of 2005, Sarkies is a hard working midfielder who dreams of one day playing for Liverpool and is a big fan of the Reds' Steven Gerrard. And speaking of red, Sarkies boots are not the only flashy things about him, he can bend it like Beckham on free-kicks. And who knows, we could see a second Sarkies in the national team – Kristian's younger brother Matthew is another player to watch.

Stuart Musialik

AGE: 21
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS (AUSTRALIA)
[redacted]

Stuart is another of the development players from the Socceroos' Germany 2006 campaign who now has a chance to show what he's learnt. Born and bred in Newcastle NSW – where he currently plays A-League football for the Jets – the tricky midfielder spent time at the AIS before joining his local club Newcastle United in the old NSL three seasons ago. Musialik was also part of the Young Socceroos' squad for the World Youth Championships last year in Holland where he played almost every minute of Australia's three games. Much is expected of Stuart over the next couple of World Cup and Asian Cup campaigns as well as the 2008 Olympics in China.

ATTACKING MIDFIELDERS

Steve Corica

AGE: 33
POSITION: ATTACKING MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
[redacted]

Steve is one of the A-League stars who has a wealth of international experience. The Sydney FC midfielder has 40 appearances to his name and, ironically, one of his first appearances was against Kuwait in 1993 when we defeated tonight's opponents 1-0. Steve was a semi regular for the next eight years in the national team, the highlight being in 2001 when he played in the starting line-up that defeated Brazil and France at the Confederations Cup. After starring for Marconi, Steve played his club football for Wolves, Leicester and Walsall in England. Steve also had a successful stint in the J-League with Hiroshima Sanfrecce. He returned home for the start of the A-League last year.

Alex Brosque

AGE: 22
POSITION: ATTACKING MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 4

Since he burst onto the Australian club scene at 18 with NSL club Marconi, the tag "the next big thing" has followed Brosque around like a man-to-man marker. With his club career now gaining momentum thanks to a move back to his home city and Sydney FC, you get the feeling now is the time for the former AIS star to cement his spot in the national team. Brosque earned widespread admiration playing in season one of the A-League and was called up for Australia's first Asian Cup match in Bahrain in February. There, the Socceroos triumphed 3-1 - although Alex did not see any game time. However at his new home stadium, Brosque is a strong chance of starting... and impressing.

STRIKERS

Mark Bridge

AGE: 20
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 0

It's been a rollercoaster ride for Mark Bridge over the last 12 months. The 20 year old forward was due to play for the Young Socceroos in the August 2005 World Youth Championships, but a foot injury put paid to that. He then struggled through the first season of the A-League with the Jets as injury problems took their toll. However, with his fitness back to what it should be and a strong off-season, Mark is not only part of the Olyroo set up, he's now a Socceroo. Sydney-born Mark was a student at the famed Westfield Sports High School and is a product of the NSW Institute of Sport. At a young age, Bridge played in the NSL with Parramatta Power.

Joel Griffiths

AGE: 26
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Joel scored one of the Socceroos' five goals against Jamaica in a friendly last October but with such competition for places, he was unable to secure a spot in the final squad for Germany. His club career has recently seen him return to Australia to play for Newcastle Jets after a stint with Leeds United in the English championship.
Griffiths' versatility is such that he can be used as an attacking midfielder or as an out-and-out striker. Sydney fans will remember his superb attacking partnership with Mile Sterjovski for Sydney United then Parramatta Power in the NSL some years ago. Joel turns 27 in five days.

Archie Thompson

AGE: 27
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 18

Arguably our most explosive forward, Archie played a crucial role in our qualification for Germany when he ran his heart out for 52 minutes in Montevideo after starting against Uruguay. Unable to force his way into the starting XI in Germany, he's now more determined than ever to make a run-on berth his own. Archie is also now back in the A-League with Melbourne Victory after a stint with PSV Eindhoven last season (where he was coached by Guus Hiddink). At 27, Archie is in his prime and over the next four years the Australian public should see him at his best. His 21 goals in a Socceroo shirt include a staggering 13 goals in one match against American Samoa in 2001.

Saso Petrovski

AGE: 31
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
SOCCEROO APPEARANCES: 1

Sydney-raised Saso is another member of the A-League champion side to receive a call-up. His nine-goal haul in the competition's inaugural 2005/6 season has put him back in national team reckoning five years after he came on as a substitute during the Socceroos' 3-0 loss to Japan in a friendly. Saso enjoyed a stellar club career in Australia, winning two NSL grand finals with Wollongong Wolves in 2000 before he was signed by Danish powerhouse Viborg. After two seasons he returned home to Australia where he appeared for Parramatta Power (under Nick Theodorakopoulos) before becoming one of Sydney FC's first signings.

AUSTRALIA

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JUSTIN DELANEY WHO'S SITTING BEHIND BIG DUKES?

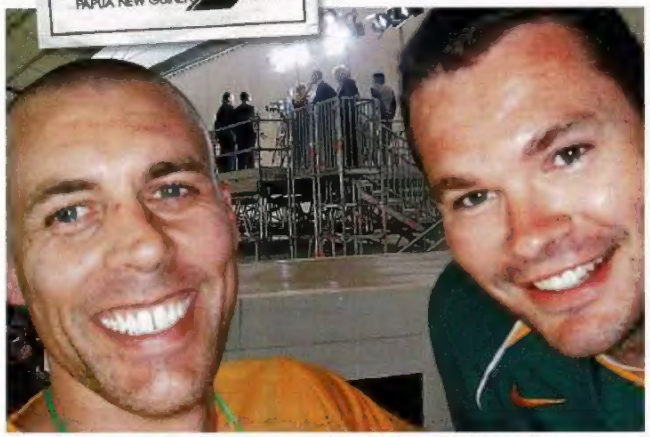
Socceroo-mad Justin Delaney was just 11 when he first saw Australia in action...

Interview by Jackson Gothe-Snape

AGE: 35

WHICH WAS THE FIRST SOCCEROOS MATCH YOU WATCHED?:
I actually first saw the Young Socceroos play in Papua New Guinea. I was in the curtain raiser that day playing for Papua. It was about 1982. I've got the match programme actually, with Robbie Slater and Frank Farina in it!

WHO DO YOU USUALLY WATCH THE SOCCEROOS WITH?:
Different people... but generally one mate of mine, Matt. He and I go at every chance. We went to France '98 and go to a lot of football together.



Four passionate Aussie football fans: who else can you see?

FAVOURITE RETIRED SOCCEROO:
Probably Fozzie (Craig Foster) but more for his post-playing exploits than anything else. His commentary for the qualifiers, his passion, was unbelievable.

FAVOURITE CURRENT SOCCEROO:
Stan Lazaridis, the flying kebab! I'll never forget him in the qualifier in '97 against Iran. I've always loved the way he's played for Australia but also seeing him that day with his head in the pitch for 10 minutes after the game was memorable. He's one of the players that steps up better than anyone.

CRAZIEST SOCCEROO STORY?:
At the Australia v Croatia game, I had Croatian fans walking up to me and wanting to take my photo as Viduka. They actually thought I was Mark Viduka! I also planned my family's entire holiday to Europe around the World Cup. We organised it so that my mum could come over, so she could help with babysitting more than anything... My brother-in-law and I then headed off to watch the games in Germany.

FAVOURITE SOCCEROO STRIP:
I can't go past the one they wore in the Uruguay qualifiers, but the 'spew' look from the 1990s was pretty good as well!

WHERE WERE YOU FOR JOHN ALOISI'S PENALTY?:
Behind the other goal.

IN ONE WORD HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THAT MOMENT?:
Emotional.

WHO WILL BE OUR MOST IMPORTANT PLAYER FOR THE 2010 WORLD CUP?:
Hopefully we don't know of him yet! I'm hoping there's going to be a player that has yet to appear, and I mean that honestly. My fingers are crossed that there'll be another Harry Kewell that comes out of the blue like he did against Iran. Otherwise, I'd say Lucas Neill.

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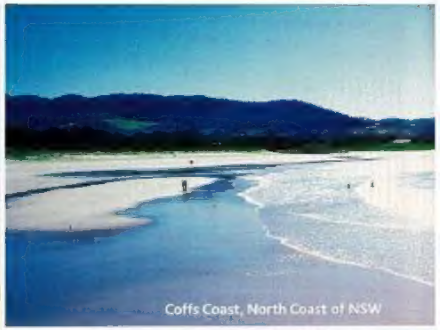
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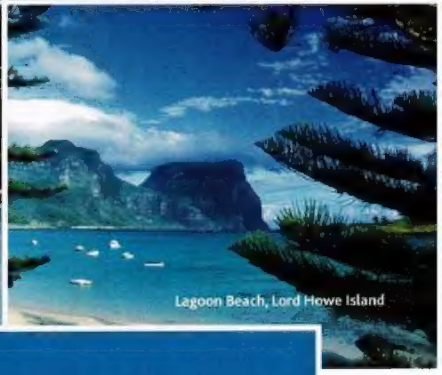
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How many? Tonight's sell-out crowd is just the start of it! The Asian Cup is absolutely huge...

100
THE KUWAIT FOOTBALL TEAM'S OFFICIAL FIFA RANKING

2,418,677
KUWAIT'S POPULATION

0
THE NUMBER OF GOALS SCORED IN KUWAIT'S LAST MATCH AGAINST BAHRAIN

1 BILLION
THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERNATIONALLY WHO WILL WATCH THE ASIAN CUP

10
THE PERCENTAGE OF THE WORLD'S OIL RESERVES ESTIMATED TO BE IN KUWAIT

2
THE NUMBER OF TIMES THE ASIAN CUP FINAL HAS BEEN DECIDED ON PENALTIES

16
THE NUMBER OF TEAMS THAT WILL COMPETE IN THE ASIAN CUP FINALS

748,000,000
CHINA'S CUMULATIVE TV AUDIENCE FOR THEIR ASIAN CUP FINAL AGAINST JAPAN IN 2004

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